

Intern arrives green, leaves Air Force blue

by 1st Lt. Jessica Phelps, Space Vehicles Directorate

HANSCOM AIR FORCE BASE, Mass. — Some people spend their summers in college lying on the beach or moving back in with mom and dad, but a select few spend 10 weeks working for the Air Force as part of the Reserve Officer Training Corps Technical Recruiting Internship Program or TRIP, which is designed to attract engineering students to the Air Force.

Andrew Kopeikin, a junior attending the University of Illinois, was not sure what he was going to do this summer until he skimmed across an advertisement about the TRIP program in his college newspaper.

"The Air Force placed an ad in my school's newspaper, so I went to talk with the ROTC detachment commander and he helped me apply," Mr. Kopeikin said. "Four weeks later, we found out I got the internship."

Knowing he would be working for the Air Force Research Laboratory meant Mr. Kopeikin's summer plans were in place, but the location was still a mystery.

"I didn't know where they were going to send me, so Hanscom was a cool surprise," Mr. Kopeikin said. "I've gone into Boston many times over the summer, I've been to Gloucester, climbed Mt. Washington, and went to New York."

Working for AFRL has opened Mr. Kopeikin's eyes to life as an engineer in the military.

"I don't have any connections to the military, so I wanted to see what the military life-style was like to see if I want to join."

Over the past 10 weeks, Mr. Kopeikin has worked with three military officers and one civilian engineer who changed his stereotypes of the military working environment.

"Officer's are just like regular people doing their job," Mr. Kopeikin said. "I thought officer's would be commanding some big unit, more like what you see in the movies, having people running around saying yes sir, yes ma'am. Now I see it's just like a normal job you would get out of college."

Learning about military life was only part of Mr. Kopeikin's experience during his internship.

"I worked in the Space Vehicles Directorate on the Optical Turbulence Impact Prediction Program dealing with clear air turbulence at high altitudes," Mr. Kopeikin said. "More specifically, for my project I looked at how high altitude aircraft are affected by turbulence, and how to simulate these problems creating ways to predict when turbulence will occur at that altitude."

As part of his preparation for this work, Mr. Kopeikin and his mentor, 2nd Lt. Michael Walker, spent a week at the Air Force Academy learning to use aircraft performance prediction programs.

Mr. Kopeikin was asked by his supervisor to give a presentation about his project and experiences while working for AFRL.

"Andrew contributed a substantial amount of work for such a short trip and I wanted to make sure that we get the maximum amount of benefit from that work," said Dr. George Jumper, Optical Turbulence Impact Prediction Program manager. "There's nothing like having to give a presentation to other people to motivate obtaining some closure on the project and tying up the loose ends. It will also help to document the effort so that we can continue the work that he helped us start."

With his internship coming to an end, Mr. Kopeikin is gearing up for another year of school, but the effects of his time here may expand his internship into a career.

"In the next few weeks, I will be evaluated by my supervisor from the lab and Air Force officials to see if they want to offer me an ROTC scholarship," Mr. Kopeikin said. "I like engineering a lot and the possibility of getting the scholarship, and Air Force life in general, is definitely appealing, much more so than before this internship."

Four other interns participated in the TRIP program at Hanscom Air Force Base: Clinton Broussard, Ashley Burns, Nick Florendo and Megan Reedy. @